

Letter 622a  
St.-Rémy, December 1889

My dear friends, Mr. and Mrs. Ginoux,

I do not know whether you remember – I think it rather strange that it is nearly a year since Mrs. Ginoux was taken ill at the same time as myself; and that it remained the same until just before Christmas – for several days in the current year I had rather a bad attack, however it passed off very quickly; I have not had any for a week. So, my dear friends, as now and then we suffer together, this makes me think of what Mrs. Ginoux said – “When you are friends, you are friends for a long time...” Personally I believe that the adversities one meets with in the ordinary course of life do us as much good as harm. The very complaint that makes one ill today, overwhelming one with discouragement, that same thing – once the disease has passed off – gives us the energy to get up and to want to be completely recovered tomorrow.

I assure you that last year I almost hated the idea of regaining my health – of only feeling somewhat better for a shorter or longer time – always living in fear of relapses – I almost hated the idea, I tell you – so little did I feel inclined to begin again. Often I said to myself that I preferred that there be nothing further, that this be the end. Ah well – it would seem that we are not the masters of this – of our existence – it seems that what matters is that one should learn to want to go on living, even when suffering. Oh, I feel so cowardly in this respect; even when my health has returned, I am still afraid. So who am I to encourage others, you will say, for actually this is my style. Well, it is only to tell you, my dear friends, that I hope so ardently, and even dare believe that Mrs. Ginoux’s illness will be of very short duration, and that she will rise from her sickbed a much stronger fellow, but she knows only too well how fond we all are of her, and how much we wish to see her in good health. In my own case my disease has done me good – it would be ungrateful not to acknowledge it. It has made me easier in my mind, and is wholly different from what I expected and imagined; this year I have had better luck than I dared hope for.

But if I had not been so well cared for, if people had not been so good to me as they have been, I am convinced I should have dropped dead or lost my reason completely. Business is business, and in the same way duty is duty, and therefore it is only fair that I go back to see my brother soon, but I assure you that it will be hard for me to leave the South; I say this to all of you who have become my friends – my friends for a long time.

I have forgotten to thank you for the olives you sent me some time ago, they were excellent; I shall bring back the boxes in a little while...

So I write you this letter, my dear friends, in order to try and distract our dear patient for a moment, so that she may once again show us her habitual smile and give pleasure to all who know her. As I told you, within a fortnight I hope to visit you, wholly recovered.

Diseases exist to remind us that we are not made of wood, and it seems to me this is the bright side of it all. And after that one dreams of taking up one’s daily work again, being less afraid of obstacles, with a new stock of serenity; and even at parting one will tell oneself, “And when you are friends, you are friends for a long time” – for this is the way to leave each other.

Well, we shall be seeing each other soon, and my best wishes for Mrs. Ginoux’s swift recovery.

Believe me

Ever yours, Vincent